

## Message Text

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ACTION SS-15

INFO OCT-01 NEA-11 ISO-00 A-01 SSO-00 /028 W  
-----115005 081457Z /43

R 081047Z JUN 78  
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1390

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 TUNIS 4101

FOR M AND NEA

E.O.11652: NA  
TAGS: PINT NEA TS  
SUBJ: SUBSTANTIVE REPORTING: STATUS REPORT

REF: (A) 77 STATE 210477; (B) 77 STATE 131292; (C) 77 TUNIS 6529

1. IN TUNIS REFTTEL, WE PROMISED TO KEEP A CAREFUL EYE ON OUTGOING TELEGRAPHIC TRAFFIC WITH A VIEW TO ELIMINATING REPORTING THAT WAS NOT ESSENTIAL AND TO REDUCING REPORTING THAT WAS ESSENTIAL TO THE BRIEFEST, HIGHEST QUALITY ANALYSES POSSIBLE. SINCE THAT TIME, THE DCM AT THIS EMBASSY HAS BEEN CHARGED WITH KEEPING A RECORD OF THE VOLUME OF INCOMING AND OUTGOING TELEGRAPHIC TRAFFIC BY ALL AGENCIES IN THE FIRM BELIEF THAT AN EXCESS OF WORDS IS THE WORST ENEMY OF QUALITY REPORTING. IN THE LAST NINE MONTHS, WE HAVE DISCERNED CONTINUING TRENDS THAT WE SUSPECT ARE NOT UNIQUE TO TUNIS, AND WE ARE REPORTING OUR FINDINGS IN THE HOPE THAT THEY WILL BE OF MORE GENERAL INTEREST.

2. WHILE WE ARE NOT COMPLETELY SATISFIED WITH OUR EFFORTS TO KEEP TELEGRAPHIC TRAFFIC DOWN TO THE MINIMUM NEEDED TO DO THE JOB, WE ARE FAIRLY WELL CONVINCED THAT WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO PRODUCE A BETTER QUALITY PRODUCT

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BY MAINTAINING TIGHT CONTROLS ON THE NUMBER AND LENGTH OF MESSAGES THAT EMANATE FROM THIS POST. FOLLOWING THE SECRETARY'S ADMONITION TO FIVE GREATER ATTENTION TO WEEDING OUT MARGINAL REPORTING, WE BEGAN KEEPING RECORDS. WE HAVE TAKEN AS A BASE PERIOD THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE YEAR. IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 1975, ALL ELEMENTS OF THIS MISSION SENT 1,850 TELEGRAPHIC

MESSAGES. THE NUMBER ROSE TO 2,500 IN 1976, DECLINED TO 2,200 IN 1977, AND ROSE TO 2,600 IN 1978. WE ARE REASONABLY WELL SATISFIED WITH THESE FIGURES, CONSIDERING THAT THE FIRST QUARTER OF 1978 WAS PROBABLY THE MOST POLITICALLY ACTIVE IN TUNISIA IN THE LAST TWENTY YEARS AND THAT THE AID MISSION HAS BEEN MORE ACTIVE LATELY THAN IN A NUMBER OF YEARS. GIVEN THESE FACTS, WE DO NOT FIND IT A CAUSE FOR CONCERN THAT THE NUMBER OF GROUPS SENT INCREASED NO MORE THAN FROM 150,000 IN 1976 TO 184,000 IN 1978. WE BELIEVE THAT AS A RESULT OF KEEPING DOWN THE VOLUME OF OUR REPORTING ITS QUALITY HAS IMPROVED. WE HOPE THAT WASHINGTON AGREES.

3. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE HAVE TO REPORT THAT THE VOLUME OF INCOMING TRAFFIC, MOSTLY FROM WASHINGTON, GROWS AT QUITE AN EXTRAORDINARY RATE. WE HAVE TRIED TO ANALYZE WHY THIS IS SO. IT IS NOT THE NUMBER OF MESSAGES THAT HAS INCREASED SO DRAMATICALLY (FIRST QUARTER OF 1975--3,850; AND IN 1978--4,900). BY SIMPLE ARITHMETIC, IT OBVIOUSLY IS THE LENGTH OF MESSAGES THAT HAS ACCOUNTED FOR AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF GROUPS RECEIVED IN THE FIRST QUARTER BETWEEN 1975 AND 1978 FROM 1,265,000 TO 2,445,000. OUR NATURAL FIRST REACTION WAS TO ASSUME THAT "THOSE OTHER AGENCIES" WERE RESPONSIBLE. A REVIEW, #923;34, REVEALS THAT NON-STATE MESSAGES IN 1975 AVERAGED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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290 GROUPS IN LENGTH, 294 IN 1976, 291 IN 1977, AND 317 IN 1978. OBVIOUSLY THE CULPRIT IS TO BE SOUGHT ELSEWHERE.

4. WHILE WE RECOGNIZE THAT A STATE SUBSTANTIVE MESSAGE (EXCLUDING ADMINISTRATIVE TRAFFIC) IS LIKELY TO BE MORE WORDY, WE ARE IMPRESSED BY THE FACT THAT THE AVERAGE STATE PROGRAM MESSAGE TO THIS EMBASSY IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 1975 AVERAGED 445 GROUPS, IN 1976 WAS 645 GROUPS, IN 1977 HAD RISEN TO 800 GROUPS, AND IN 1978 REACHED 1,030 GROUPS. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN PRACTICAL TERMS? IN 1975 WE RECEIVED IN THE FIRST QUARTER 410,000 GROUPS OF STATE PROGRAM TELEGRAPHIC TRAFFIC; 1978 WE RECEIVED 1,290,000 GROUPS--MORE THAN TRIPLE. TO PUT THIS IN TERMS THAT ARE UNDERSTANDABLE TO THE PERSON WHO IS SUPPOSED TO BE READING THIS TRAFFIC, AN AVERAGE NOVEL RUNS 60,000 WORDS. DEPARTMENT OF STATE PROGRAM MESSAGES TO THIS EMBASSY IN A THREE-MONTH PERIOD HAVE AVERAGED TWENTY NOVELS (EQUATING A GROUP TO A WORD) OR THE LIFETIME PRODUCT OF A FAIRLY PROLIFIC WRITER. DO WE REALLY HAVE THAT MUCH TO SAY IN A THREE-MONTH PERIOD TO ONE EMBASSY?

CONSIDERING THAT THERE ARE 200 STATE DEPARTMENT TELE-  
GRAPHIC ADDRESSEES AND THAT EACH MF THESE ADDRESSEES  
WILL RUN OF 3 TO 25 COPIES OF EVERY TELEGRAM, THE  
QUESTION IS WHETHER A BUSY SUBSTANTIVE OFFICER HAS  
THE TIME TO READ WHAT PASSES OVER HIS DESK EVEN IF  
ALL OF IT IS OF HIGH INTEREST.

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ACTION SS-15

INFO OCT-01 NEA-11 ISO-00 A-01 SSO-00 /028 W  
-----114476 081458Z /43  
R 081047Z JUN 78  
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1391

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FOR M AND NEA

5. WE ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO JUDGE WHETHER OUR  
SITUATION IS TYPICAL, AND WE RECOGNIZED THAT AS AN  
NEA POST WE ARE IN A HIGH TRAFFIC AREA, BUT FROM AN  
EXAMINATION OF THE LENGTHY MESSAGES THAT SEEM TO BE  
CAUSING THIS EXPLOSION IN TELEGRAPHIC TRAFFIC WE NOTE  
THAT (1) ALMOST ALL ARE MULTIPLE ADDRESSEE MESSAGES,  
(2) USUALLY CONTAINING BACKGROUND INFORMATION, AND (3)  
SELDOM REQUIRING IMMEDIATE ACTION. WE UNDERSTAND THAT  
THIS IS A COMPLEX PROBLEM, BUT WE WOULD OFFER ONLY ONE  
SIMPLE THOUGHT: IT IS NOT A SUFFICIENT EXCUSE TO SAY  
THAT NO ONE READS MATERIAL THAT IS NOT IN TELEGRAPHIC  
FORM. OBVIOUSLY AT SOME POINT NOBODY IS GOING TO BE  
ABLE TO READ ALL MATERIAL THAT IS IN TELEGRAPHIC  
FORM. IT WOULD SEEM THAT ULTIMATELY IT MUST BE MOYE  
COST EFFECTIVE TO TAKE THAT TIVE TO PARE MESSAGES DOWN  
TO THEIR ESSENTIALS AND TO TAILOR THEM TO THE ADDRESSEE  
THAN IT IS TO TAKE THE EASY OPTION OF PRESSING THE  
BUTTON THAT SAYS "ALL DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR POSTS"  
FOR A PIECE OF MATERIAL THAT HAS NOT BEEN PROPERLY  
EDITED AT THE SOURCE. AT THE SAME TIME, CLEARANCE  
PROBLEMS WOULD BE PROPORTIONATELY DECREASED.

6. ARE WE BEING UNREASONABLE AND/OR IS THIS A PROBLEM

THAT IS NOT SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE KIND OF DISCIPLINE WE  
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PROPOSE? WE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN THE DEPARTMENT'S  
VIEWS, RECOGNIZING THAT IN SENDING THIS MESSAGE WE  
HAVE ADDED 1,250 GROUPS TO TODAY'S TELEGRAPHIC  
TRAFFIC.  
MULCAHY

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 jan 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** REPORTS, DEPARTMENTAL TELEGRAMS, POLITICAL SUMMARIES  
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**Draft Date:** 08 jun 1978  
**Decaption Date:** 01 jan 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 20 Mar 2014  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
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**Enclosure:** n/a  
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**Errors:** N/A  
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**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
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Sheryl P. Walter  
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